Alberta

NORTHERN ALBERTA
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Advancing

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NORTHERN ECONOMY

101-07210/

Travel North 98:
Tourism Excellence Through Cooperation

Conference Proceedings

Travel North 98:

Conference Proceedings

Prepared by:
Northern Development Branch

February 1999

Alberta
NORTHERN ALBERTA
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

February 1999

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The Northern Alberta Development Council (NADC) is pleased to present the conference proceedings for the *Travel North 98: Tourism Excellence Through Cooperation* conference held December 3 and 4, 1998 in Slave Lake.

The NADC recognizes the great potential for tourism in northern Alberta and the important role it will play as the northern economy continues to diversify. Through our past and current work with the northern tourism industry, the NADC has heard various concerns from stakeholders regarding the development of their industry. In response to these concerns, the NADC commissioned a review of the northern tourism industry. The results of this review were discussed at *Travel North 98*. NADC hosted the conference, with sponsorships from Alberta Economic Development, the Alberta North Tourism Destination Region, Economic Development Edmonton, and West Edmonton Mall.

The conference focused on how northerners involved in the tourism industry could work together to improve the product and services they provide. We had three goals for the conference:

- provide a networking and educational opportunity for tourism operators and other stakeholders
- identify objectives and strategies for northern tourism
- explore cooperative approaches to tourism development in northern Alberta

The NADC would like to thank the more than 100 northerners who participated in the background research and conference. The information gathered through the research and conference process will help us as we work on the region's critical tourism issues.

M. Cardinal

Mike Cardinal, MLA
Chairman

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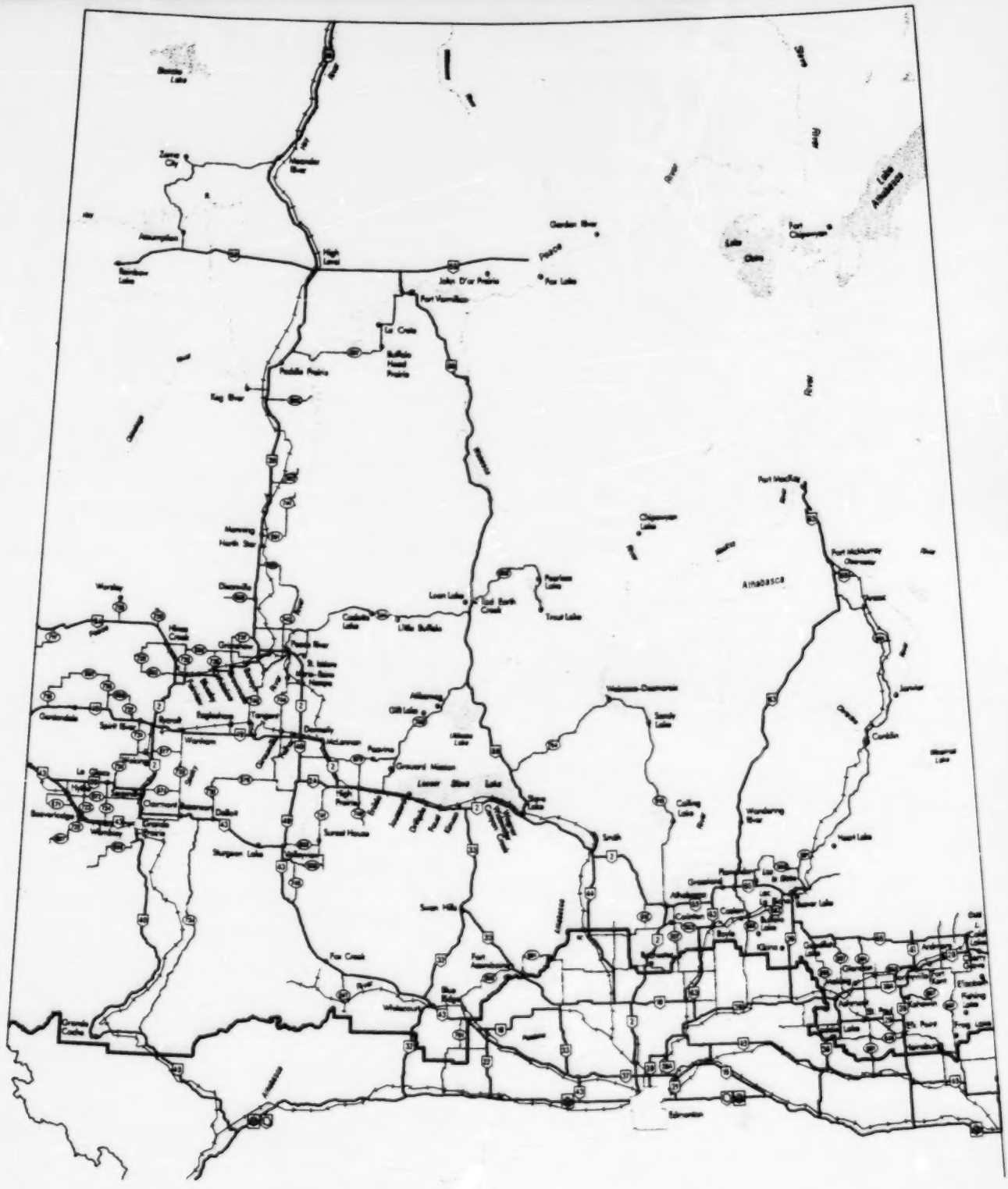

NORTHERN ALBERTA DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL AREA

Km 10 0 20 40 60 80 Km
Miles 10 0 10 20 30 40 50 Miles

PRIMARY HIGHWAY 2 SECONDARY HIGHWAY 40 RAILWAY

Produced by Resource Data Division, Alberta Environmental Protection
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Introduction

Northern Alberta Development Council

Northern Alberta covers 60% of Alberta's land mass and has 10% of the province's population. It is resource rich with:

- 90% of Alberta's forests (69% of production)
- all of Canada's oilsands development
- about 40% of oil and gas production
- 20% of Alberta's agricultural land.

Northern Alberta has enormous potential for further economic development. Many opportunities exist to capture benefits from resource developments and expand into value-added businesses. Northerners are building a strong region and making a significant contribution to the provincial economy.

NADC Goals

The NADC has three goals that define our role in northern development. We work with northerners to:

Promote emerging development opportunities.

Council does research and sponsors workshops and other events to identify and raise awareness of opportunities in areas such as value-added agriculture, heavy oil expansion and tourism.

Address barriers to economic growth.

Council is working to improve rail service and reduce telecommunications costs for northern businesses and communities.

Increase northern skill levels to take advantage of economic opportunities.

Council sponsors bursary programs for post-secondary students to develop a skilled work force and facilitates the development of training strategies.

NADC Members 1998-99

Mike Cardinal
Athabasca
Chair

Greg Lindsay
Fort McMurray
Deputy Chair

Alvin Billings
High Prairie

Doug Sklar
Athabasca

Don Erno
Sexsmith

Floyd Thompson
Kikino

Gerald McIvor
Whitecourt

Don Wieben
Fairview

Getting Involved

Your input on northern development opportunities and issues is important. To get involved, you can participate in a Council project or contact our office or an NADC member to discuss your ideas.

A publications list and project information are posted on our web page at
http://www.gov.ab.ca/nadc/
or you can contact us at:

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Conference Agenda

Thursday, December 3, 1998

Opening Remarks

Speakers:

- Floyd Thompson, NADC, Kikino, Conference Moderator
- Gerry Allarie, Mayor of Slave Lake

Keynote Address

Speaker: Michael W. Fox, Michael Fox Associates

Overview of Background Report

Speaker: Al McCully, Palliser Alliances, Edmonton

Departmental Panel

Speakers:

- Tom Mill, Manager, Special Places and Policy Branch, Strategic and Regional Support Division, Alberta Environmental Protection, Edmonton
- Bill Reynolds, Tourism Product Enhancement Coordinator, Tourism Development Agency, Alberta Economic Development, Edmonton

Partnering Presentations

Speakers:

- Dennis Pommen, Pommen and Associates Limited, Edmonton
- Susan Stephen, Tourism Manager, West Edmonton Mall

Product Packaging Exercise

Speakers:

- Dale Monaghan, Marketing Director, Alberta North Tourism Destination Region, Slave Lake
- Angele Dobie, Chair, Alberta North TDR and Executive Director, Fort McMurray Visitor's Bureau

Friday, December 4, 1998

Breakfast Session- *TDR Marketing Plan*
Speaker: Dale Monaghan, Marketing Director, Alberta North TDR

Opening Remarks
Speaker: Floyd Thompson, NADC, Kikino

Small Group Session One- *Opportunities, Issues and Priorities*

Concurrent Workshops
Session one: *Attracting Tourism Investment to your Community*
Moderator: Doug Dunn, Tourism Coordinator, Athabasca Country, Athabasca
Speakers:
- Kevin Crockett, Tourism Development Coordinator, Tourism Development Agency, Alberta Economic Development, Edmonton
- Doug Cameron, Tourism Business Attraction Specialist, Tourism Development Agency, Alberta Economic Development, Edmonton

Session two: *Aboriginal Tourism: Cultural Opportunities*
Moderator: Angele Dobie, Executive Director, Fort McMurray Visitor's Bureau
Speaker: Jack Schneider, Eagle's Nest Indian Village, Calgary

Session three: *Hospitality: Benefits and Training Opportunities*
Moderator: Steve Lane, Executive Director, Big Lake Country Tourism, Slave Lake
Speaker: Nancy Kindler, Sales Representative (North), Alberta Tourism Education Council, Edmonton

Session four: *Agri-tourism*
Moderator: Christina Grant, Tourism Coordinator, Athabasca Country, Athabasca
Speaker: Sharon Homeniuk, Rural Development Specialist - Business, Regional Advisory Services, Alberta Agriculture Food and Rural Development, Stony Plain

Small Group Session Two- *Action Plans and Roles*

Luncheon Remarks
Moderator: Mike Cardinal, MLA Athabasca-Wabasca, NADC Chairman
Speakers:
- Hon. Pearl Calahasen, MLA Lesser Slave Lake, Minister Without Portfolio Responsible for Children's Services
- Jim Edwards, President and CEO, Economic Development Edmonton

Report Back from Small Group Sessions

Moderator: Kelly Kincaid, Director, Council and Projects, Northern Development Branch, Peace River

Conference Summary

Speaker: Michael W. Fox, Michael Fox Associates

Adjournment

Speaker: Brian Pountney, Executive Director, Northern Development Branch, Peace River

Executive Summary

Travel North 98: Tourism Excellence Through Cooperation
December 3 and 4, 1998
Northwest Inn, Slave Lake, Alberta

Conference Overview

A coordinated strategic approach from stakeholders is required to develop the tourism industry in northern Alberta to its full potential. This was one of the key priorities identified by participants at the Travel North 98 Conference. Approximately 70 delegates gathered to network, express their views on northern tourism and take advantage of the expertise of speakers and other resource people in attendance. With a theme focused on cooperation and partnering, Travel North 98 afforded delegates an opportunity to learn and communicate with industry colleagues and service providers. Small group discussion sessions saw delegates identify priorities for action to improve tourism products and support services in the north. They then considered cooperative approaches for action.

The Conference was hosted by the Northern Alberta Development Council and sponsored by Alberta Economic Development, the Alberta North Tourism Destination Region, Economic Development Edmonton and West Edmonton Mall.

There were three main goals for the conference:

- provide a networking and educational opportunity for tourism operators and other stakeholders
- identify objectives and strategies for northern tourism
- explore cooperative approaches to tourism development in northern Alberta.

Delegates from the four corners of northern Alberta and points in between were present. All three Tourism Destination Regions (Alberta North, Heartland and Rocky Mountain) as well as most tourism marketing organizations in the NADC's region were represented.

Priority Areas for Action

The following priority challenges for northern tourism were identified by delegates:

- There is a need to coordinate a strategic approach to northern tourism
- Packaging and marketing of northern tourism product should be expanded
- Investment in tourism infrastructure should be increased
- Quality of customer service needs to be improved
- Northern awareness of tourism benefits and support for the industry should be increased.

Opening Session- *Thursday, December 3, 1998*

Opening Remarks

Floyd Thompson, NADC member from Kikino, welcomed delegates on behalf of the NADC. He thanked conference sponsors Alberta Economic Development, the Alberta North Tourism Destination Region, Economic Development Edmonton and West Edmonton Mall. Mr. Thompson then explained that the purpose of Travel North 98 was to look at ways we can work cooperatively to build our northern tourism industry.

He commented on the tremendous progress the north has made in tourism during the 1990s. Facilities such as Fort George Buckingham House, the Visitor Centre in Grande Cache, and the birdwatching facilities in McLennan, Slave Lake and Bonnyville have been built. Attractions such as Historic Dunvegan and the Oilsands Discovery Centre have been expanded, and operators from High Level to Athabasca are cooperating on marketing through Alberta North.

Mr. Thompson said that as businesses, communities and government we can work together to bring more tourists into the north and give them a vacation experience that is second to none. He then introduced Gerry Allarie, Mayor of Slave Lake, who provided greetings from the Town of Slave Lake.

Gerry Allarie
Mr. Allarie welcomed delegates to Slave Lake and relayed that the town was built around oil, gas and sustainable forestry. He proceeded to say that tourism is now the biggest growth area and that we have a vast area to showcase. He said the Town is putting emphasis on tourism and it is paying off economically. The Town markets itself through Big Lake Country Tourism and the Alberta North TDR. The mayor concluded by saying that he looked forward to new and exciting ideas coming forward from the conference.

Keynote Address

Following the opening remarks Mr. Thompson introduced Michael W. Fox, keynote speaker for the conference. Mr. Fox is a tourism development consultant with extensive industry experience both as business owner and as a professional consultant. Mr. Fox has 15 years consulting experience and has worked recently in the field of tourism industry/product development with the British Columbia Ministry of Tourism and the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation in Newfoundland.

Michael W. Fox
Mr. Fox described ecotourism, adventure and aboriginal tourism as the fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry today. Worldwide, tourists are looking for rural settings, wide open spaces and pristine natural beauty. He pointed out that northern Alberta has this to offer tourists,

however simply having the product to offer is not enough. Tourism development is a function of tourism marketing and it needs to be an integral component in Alberta's tourism marketing efforts.

He continued to say that:

marketing includes	marketing impacts
• Product Development	• Service
• Communications	• Product Delivery
• Reservations	• Advertising
• Public Relations	• Sales

The focus of the address delivered by Mr. Fox was on achieving results in the tourism industry. Using his industry knowledge to provide relevant examples, he conveyed the six critical steps in achieving results in tourism. They include:

- create a vision
- develop and refine that vision
- develop the product or service
- develop a marketing plan
- execute that plan
- diversify

According to Mr. Fox the keys to success for the northern tourism industry are:

☐ Networking: communicate with your industry colleagues and other stakeholders where ever and when ever possible.

☐ Create Alberta alliances and partnerships for marketing: take advantage of opportunities with the Alberta North TDR and explore other opportunities, such as with airlines and other operators throughout Canada.

☐ Provincial, National and International Marketing: a huge tourism market exists both domestically and internationally, and effective marketing is the key to tapping into it.

☐ Pursue the USA Marketplace: stress the value of the American dollar in Canada and seek business and marketing opportunities in the USA.

☐ Explore European and Asian Markets: talk to Canadian tour operators, government offices and business offices located overseas to research marketing opportunities.

☐ Be Aware of New Products, Markets and Mediums: stay informed on emerging trends and product demands in the tourism industry.

In closing, Mr. Fox suggested that if you work together with your colleagues you realize you're all in business together. If one of you succeeds, there is a greater chance that all of you will succeed.

Report on the Structure of Northern Tourism

Following Mr. Fox's presentation, NADC member Floyd Thompson introduced Al McCully of Palliser Alliances. Mr. McCully's report provides a structural overview of the northern Alberta tourism industry, and an update on the magnitude of operators in each tourism sector. Trends, needs and potential opportunities were also highlighted. The report also provides information on the roles of industry sector participants and service providers. This report was used to provide background information for the conference and is available at the Northern Development Branch. The following are some highlights from Mr. McCully's presentation.

Al McCully

Mr. McCully began by discussing the report objectives and methods. He then summarized some of the highlights from his report.

- Product Providers: there are about 800 operators in the product provider categories. The largest single category is guides and outfitters: the hunting, fishing, trail ride, and adventure ecotourism providers. The largest single component is the hunting guides. There are in excess of 150 using northern Alberta. About 58 of them actually live in northern Alberta. The next biggest category is the accommodation category at 28%, campgrounds at about 24%, and attractions at 13%. There are over 100 attractions, museums, interpretive centres, and cultural centres. There are also a handful of tour companies operating in the north.

- Service Providers: the north has great potential for growth, but this development depends on a supportive business, government and community environment. Service providers in the north include marketing organizations, government services, private sector and not-for-profit.

- Barriers and Needs: the broad areas of need are product supply and quality, infrastructure and access, and marketing. Public support for tourism as well as visitor service and training were other areas of need identified in the report.

- Competitive Advantage: the north has many unique assets and competitive advantages upon which product development and marketing can further capitalize. These include natural resources, scenery, cultural and heritage attractions, and existing positive perceptions of these assets.

- Opportunities: the key areas of opportunity are in infrastructure improvements, product supply and quality, packaging and marketing.

Mr. McCully then presented a Product Assessment Model. This model provides a framework to assess the existing product in northern Alberta, and what the industry has to do to further develop market ready product for domestic and international visitors.

PRODUCT ASSESSMENT MODEL

Core Experience	Access	Accommodation	Animation	Marketing
Defined by each product operator	Getting there Getting around when there	Capacity, quality and availability	Things to see and do The reason people come	Consumers' views Distribution

Source: Canadian Tourism Commission, 1997.

Mr. McCully concluded with a northern application of the Product Assessment Model. The major travel routes to and through the North can be characterized as a journey of discovery, not unlike what the First Nations peoples and fur traders experienced along many of these same land and water routes hundreds of years ago. From a marketing perspective, significant opportunity exists to create the necessary animation and imagery in the prospective visitor's mind to draw more visitors to the North. These images can be formed around the many anticipated sights, sounds, and feelings of the experience. The land of big lakes and big rivers, vast forests, open space, significant heritage resources, historic trade & travel routes, accessible wilderness, major parks, fish and wildlife, and wilderness lodges are strengths on which the North can be further marketed to deliver these experiences.

Panel Presentations

Departmental Panel

Following the presentation of his report Al McCully continued on to moderate the departmental panel. He introduced Tom Mill, Manager of the Special Places, Policy and Planning Branch of Alberta Environmental Protection and Bill Reynolds, Tourism Product Enhancement Coordinator with the Tourism Development Agency of Alberta Economic Development.

Tom Mill

Mr. Mill began with a discussion of the Special Places program. He said the vision for Special Places is to complete a network of protected areas which represents the environmental diversity of Alberta's six Natural Regions and twenty Subregions. He continued by giving the program goals for Recreation and Protected Areas:

- Preservation- to preserve and protect in perpetuity a system of representative, special and outstanding natural landscapes and features as well as landscape-related prehistoric, historic and cultural resources in Alberta.
- Heritage Appreciation- to provide opportunities to explore, understand and appreciate the natural, historical and cultural heritage of Alberta, and enhance public awareness of our natural environment, and our relationship to and dependence on it.
- Outdoor Recreation- to provide a variety of intensive and dispersed outdoor recreation opportunities and related services.

- Tourism- to encourage residents and visitors to discover and enjoy the natural, historical and cultural resources of the province through a variety of recreation opportunities, facilities and accommodation services.

Mr. Mill then walked delegates through the Special Places site designation process: site selection and nomination by Albertans, government review, local committee review and recommendations, government approval, and finally site designation.

Mr. Mill also explained how the proposed provincial Natural Heritage Act will affect Special Places. He stated that presently, any new Special Places will be classified under one of the existing designations. Once the Natural Heritage Act is in place Special Places can be classified under one of the proposed five classes. Mr. Mill also said that, the department has recently moved to include Forest Land Use Zones as an alternative protected area category (eg. Castle Special Management Area).

Bill Reynolds

Mr. Reynolds gave delegates an overview of services provided by the Tourism Development Agency. He explained the purpose of his agency is to accelerate development, enhance competitiveness, and to generate increased visitor sales. The agency serves those who want to: lay the groundwork for tourism development, be in the tourism industry, start up a tourism operation, and enhance their product offering. Mr. Reynolds then provided information on services provided by the Tourism Development Agency to tourism industry stakeholders.

Roles of the Tourism Development Agency:

☐ Position land opportunity base
  - assist public land lease applicants
  - establish development nodes

☐ Attract business and investment
  - support needs of qualified investors
  - promote investment at planned development nodes

☐ Support Strategic Tourism Marketing Council

☐ Provide information to aid decision making

☐ Assist with Development Opportunity Identification

☐ Tourism Trends Analysis
☐ Provide Market and Product Intelligence

☐ Assist in Finding Funding/Financing Sources

☐ Links to Service Providers and Partnership Creation

Partnering Presentations

Following the departmental panel, Floyd Thompson introduced two speakers who provided perspectives on partnering opportunities for tourism businesses. The first speaker was Susan Stephen, Tourism Manager from West Edmonton Mall. She was followed by Dennis Pommen, President Pommen and Associates Limited. He gave an overview of the Highway Service Rest Area (HSRA) Partnership Program on behalf of Alberta Transportation and Utilities.

Susan Stephen

Ms. Stephen gave delegates an update on some of the work she does as tourism manager for the Mall. She expressed the Mall's interest in offering complementary packages with northern tourism product. Furthermore Ms. Stephen extended an open offer to northern operators and marketers to contact her to discuss any proposals or ideas they may have that would use the Mall as a partner. West Edmonton Mall is an internationally recognized tourist destination and offers a wealth of partnering opportunities that northern businesses should look to take advantage of.

Dennis Pommen

Mr. Pommen began by explaining that he was contracted by Alberta Transportation and Utilities to conduct the Highway Service Rest Area (HSRA) pilot project along Yellowhead Highway #16. He then relayed that the intent of the HSRA program is to engage existing and future rural private owners and operators to provide the traveling public with needed services. This is one alternative being studied to address the demand for quality HSRAs. To qualify for the HRSA program operators must meet the following criteria:

- Open 365 days per year
- Minimum Parking
- Uniform Signage
- Alberta Best Program
- Washrooms
- Travel Information
- Free Public Services
- Two Year Commitment

Mr. Pommen explained that the benefits of this program are:

- Increase existing business exposure
- Provides a broader range of services
- Utilize existing infrastructure
- Increase customer service innovation
- Increases number of outlets

He continued to say that the pilot project is currently underway between Jasper Gates and Lloydminster and will be evaluated after a year. If the pilot project is successful there is the potential for province wide application.

Product Packaging Session

Floyd Thompson began the session by introducing the two speakers:

- Dale Monaghan, Marketing Director, Alberta North TDR
- Angele Dobie, Chair, Alberta North TDR, and Executive Director, Fort McMurray Visitor's Bureau

Mr. Monaghan and Ms. Dobie delivered an upbeat and information filled presentation/group exercise on developing product packages. The exercise outlined the critical steps in putting together a successful package and got delegates involved hands on through the group exercise format.

Breakfast Session- *Friday, December 4, 1998*

Dale Monaghan, Marketing Director, from the Alberta North TDR presented to delegates over the breakfast session. Mr. Monaghan's presentation highlighted:

- an overview of how TDRs fit in with the provincial tourism marketing structure
- opportunities to work with the Alberta North TDR and examples of recent campaign successes
- the TDR's marketing plans for 1999.

Small Group Sessions

Following the breakfast session the plenary portion of the second day began with an overview of the agenda by Floyd Thompson. Delegates then broke into five small groups for facilitated discussions on challenges and future directions for the northern tourism industry. The session goals were:

- to identify priorities for action to improve tourism products and support services in the north
- to identify cooperative approaches for action

Facilitators guided group discussions and recorded relevant information as participants worked through intensive questions on opportunities and barriers facing the northern tourism industry. In session one the groups looked at industry challenges from various perspectives (community, tourism business, tourist and government) and considered them on both local and regional levels. Session two saw the list of challenges prioritized by delegates. Finally delegates discussed ideas on coordinated approaches to meet these challenges. Two sets of small group discussions were held, before and after the concurrent workshops. Results of all the discussions are compiled here.

Priority Challenges For Northern Tourism

The issues and priority challenges identified by the five working groups are summarized below. The key strategies along with actions suggested by delegates to address these challenges are listed under each priority area.

1. ***There is a need to coordinate a strategic approach to northern tourism***
   - partnership and cooperation is needed by all stakeholders throughout the tourism industry
   - a communication network/system for stakeholders is essential
   - program listings of government and agency programs and services related to tourism need to be more accessible to potential and existing operators
   - all government agencies with a tourism related mandate for the north need to meet to explore opportunities to coordinate efforts. NADC could initiate this process.

2. ***Packaging and marketing of northern tourism product should be expanded***
   - operators must be proactive to expand partnerships as well as explore new partnering opportunities
   - the northern industry needs to focus efforts to come up with 3 - 4 winning packages to use as models
   - the lack of coordination between marketing and the product sales component of the northern industry has created a problem which could potentially be solved cooperatively i.e. northern tourism product could be packaged, marketed and sold by a company created and funded by investment from northern stakeholders
   - operators need to continue to share marketing costs and take advantage of opportunities in their area

3. ***Investment in tourism infrastructure should be increased***
   - the tourism industry and government should encourage investment on all levels (local, regional, provincial and federal)
   - the northern industry and government should set tourism product and service quality standards, demonstrate need for improvements, and lobby for funding
   - industry and municipalities can work to make infrastructure funding a priority with federal, provincial and municipal governments
   - industry can work with community and regional leaders to attract investment
   - industry needs to show the value of tourism to potential private investment interests

4. ***Quality of customer service needs to be improved***
   - increase availability of hospitality and tourism training
   - tourism operators should partner with municipalities and other businesses to get buy-in to hospitality training

- businesses should use resources of Alberta Tourism Education Council
- government and/or industry should require training/certification for applicable service related occupations
- northern industry could implement an awareness campaign for businesses who provide great service
- operators should establish service standards for partners who wish to package product with them
- municipalities could adopt a community ambassadorship program

5. ***Northern awareness of tourism benefits and support for the industry should be increased***
   - tourism industry needs to highlight northern tourism business success stories
   - need to capitalize on media exposure to show benefits of tourism
   - industry should communicate with local chambers of commerce, rotary clubs and other business organizations
   - provincial department and municipalities need to collect information on benefits e.g. statistics or economic impact model for tourism activities
   - stakeholders can create a vision for northern tourism and get involvement from all levels
   - industry/operators should lobby for more regional support staff
   - tourism industry operators should band together for a united voice on tourism issues

Other issues raised in small group discussions included:

- need for tourist friendly and oriented signage
- feeling that tourism is not a priority for the provincial government
- banks and other lenders are hesitant to fund tourism businesses
- tourism industry resource people with expertise in fields like marketing, product development, quality assurance, and tourism sales are scarcely available to northern tourism operators

Facilitators for the small group sessions:

Group 1 Brad Bishop, Northern Development Branch, Peace River
Group 2 Kelly Kincaid, Northern Development Branch, Peace River
Group 3 Bill Reynolds, Tourism Development Agency, Edmonton
Group 4 Kevin Crockett, Tourism Development Agency, Edmonton
Group 5 Doug Cameron, Tourism Development Agency, Edmonton and
Sharon Homeniuk, Alberta Agriculture Food and Rural Development, Stony Plain

Concurrent Workshops

Travel North 98 featured a series of concurrent workshops on some pertinent issues and

opportunities in the northern tourism industry. Each workshop began with a presentation from the speaker(s) followed by a question and answer period.

Delegates could choose one of four workshops:

- ☐ Attracting Tourism Investment to your Community
- ☐ Aboriginal Tourism: Cultural Opportunities
- ☐ Hospitality: Benefits and Training Opportunities
- ☐ Agri-tourism

A brief summary of speaker comments from each workshop is given below.

Attracting Tourism Investment to your Community

Doug Dunn, Tourism Coordinator from Athabasca Country, opened the session by introducing the workshop speakers:

- Kevin Crockett, Tourism Development Coordinator, Tourism Development Agency, Alberta Economic Development, Edmonton
- Doug Cameron, Tourism Business Attraction Specialist, Tourism Development Agency, Alberta Economic Development, Edmonton

Mr. Cameron and Mr. Crockett gave a dynamic and informative presentation beginning with Alberta's attraction strengths and weaknesses. They then moved into future product trends and product development priorities for investors. Investor expectations such as product compatibility, development readiness and accessibility were then discussed. In motivating and marketing to the investor emotion is a critical factor. They advised that visual images sell, so incorporate a strong written and visual image that emphasizes lifestyle, and sell friendliness and service.

Profiles of investors and new business operators were presented followed by information on how and what to show investors and new tourism businesses. The presentation was concluded with a look at the top five features investors are looking for:

- aesthetics: natural beauty
- water
- private land
- tourism critical mass: other facilities and amenities for tourists in reasonable proximity
- access to markets

Aboriginal Tourism: Cultural Opportunities

Angele Dobie, Executive Director of the Fort McMurray Visitor's Bureau, began the session by

introducing Jack Schneider. Mr. Schneider is a Calgary-based entrepreneur who is involved with the Eagle's Nest Indian Village.

Mr. Schneider began his presentation by describing the site on the Old Man River where the Eagle's Nest Indian Village is located. The village can accommodate up to 40 visitors and offers a premium quality mixture of Blackfoot and Canadian food. He qualified the village as offering a soft adventure product including such activities as canoeing, horseback riding, fishing and native crafts.

The village provides an authentic aboriginal experience. For example, visitors can experience a sweat lodge ceremony where they are lectured on the tradition, help build and then take part in the ceremony. Ceremonies are performed only by tribal elders who have had rights transferred. Mr. Schneider described a close relationship with the Peigan band. Mr. Schneider owns and markets the site and the band carries out the traditional activities.

Mr. Schneider noted two key factors for success for those considering this type of business:

- Authentic Product- bands should ensure that activities reflect their own culture. For example, northern bands have very different heritage and traditions from the Blackfoot and Plains Cree.
- Pricing: prices must be consistent regardless of who sells the product (wholesalers, tour operators, etc...)

Hospitality: Benefits and Training Opportunities

The session opened as Steve Lane, Executive Director for Big Lake Country Tourism introduced Nancy Kindler, Sales Representative, Alberta Tourism Education Council, Edmonton.

Ms. Kindler began her presentation by outlining the session objectives which included:

- Your competitive edge
- Alberta Best concepts
- Service recovery
- New ATEC products and services

Ms. Kindler noted that a huge gap in attitude exists in Alberta between the quality of customer service that staff and managers feel they are providing and actual customer service ratings. She provided facts and figures that showed the value of customer service to businesses. She then gave an overview of service recovery and new ATEC products and services.

Agri-tourism

Christina Grant, Tourism Coordinator for Athabasca Country, introduced Sharon Homeniuk,

Rural Development Specialist - Business, Regional Advisory Services, Alberta Agriculture Food and Rural Development, Stony Plain.

Ms. Homeniuk began her presentation by saying agri-tourism is a rather new diversification venture to most Albertans. She noted that other provinces have made advancements in this growth industry. Agri-tourism is defined as:

> "...the economic activity that occurs when people link travel with products, services or experiences of the agriculture and food system."
> Source: *Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs*

She then outlined the potential benefits of agri-tourism activities:

- generate additional farm income
- increase awareness and educate the non-farming public about farms and their products
- advertise farm products
- part of succession plan for farms

As urban populations grow the appeal of farm and countryside visitation increases. Ms. Homeniuk further explained that many people have a cultural and heritage interest in agri-tourism product. She ended her presentation by reviewing some of the logistical factors to consider before starting an agri-tourism venture. They include:

- area health, insurance and municipal regulations
- washroom facilities
- tour bus accessible
- are there other attraction and accommodation facilities in your area
- capacity for visitors

Luncheon Session

Mike Cardinal

NADC Chairman Mike Cardinal, MLA Athabasca-Wabasca, addressed delegates following the luncheon on day two of the conference. Mr. Cardinal highlighted the NADC's long history of working to promote tourism in the north. He then noted the importance of tourism to the north and to the province as a whole. Provincially it employs 100,000 people and generates over $3.75 billion in revenues each year.

He continued to say that the NADC's role is to work on strategic efforts to advance this industry in the north by:

- partnering with groups such as the Alberta North TDR, Economic Development Edmonton, and other provincial departments on projects such as this conference
- implementing a newly announced Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Alberta and the Northwest Territories. Mr. Cardinal is the Alberta co-chair and tourism

is expected to be a major focus of the MOU.

Mr. Cardinal said that provincially the government is also working to strengthen this key sector. Key points related to the province's new tourism marketing framework include:

- it was based on province wide consultation
- government and industry will work together to implement
- private sector will be contracted to oversee image promotion, research, and foreign tourism representatives
- funding will increase 55% to $16.4 million in April 1999

Mr. Cardinal concluded by saying that this increase was strongly supported by northern MLAs and that he believes that tourism industry expansion is crucial to communities and the northern economy.

He then introduced the Hon. Pearl Calahasen, MLA Lesser Slave Lake and Minister Without Portfolio Responsible for Children's Services.

Hon. Pearl Calahasen

Ms. Calahasen welcomed delegates to the Lesser Slave Lake area and commented on this region as being the "Jewel of the North". She applauded the efforts of the Alberta North TDR in marketing northern Alberta and mentioned the positive feedback received from participants in a dignitary familiarization tour that took place this summer.

The Minister said the north has a great deal to to offer tourists and potential to grow in quantity and quality. In closing, Ms. Calahasen wished northern operators continued success and expressed her thanks for the opportunity to speak at Travel North 98.

Following the Minister's comments, Mr. Cardinal introduced the luncheon speaker, Mr. Jim Edwards. Mr. Edwards is the President and CEO of Economic Development Edmonton and a former Member of Parliament. Mr. Cardinal also thanked Economic Development Edmonton for graciously sponsoring the luncheon.

Jim Edwards

Mr. Edwards began by thanking the NADC for the opportunity to participate in this event. He noted that one of the corporate objectives for Economic Development Edmonton is to look for special partnerships to the west, to Jasper, and more especially, to the north. The northern destination has no limits, it includes north of 60, but its main thrust is northern Alberta.

Mr. Edwards commented on the changing needs of visitors to our province. He said they want to learn about the country they are visiting, its culture, history, customs and in particular there is a terrific interest, on the part of Asian and European visitors, in Aboriginal Canada and the Aboriginal culture. He continued to say that he recently met with northern Alberta MLAs and

put forward the idea that northern Alberta can truly develop historically authenticated, exciting, picturesque, challenging tourism destinations and experiences like none other in the world. He sees the key to this as the trade rivers of northern Alberta: the Peace, the Athabasca, the North Saskatchewan, and their tributaries.

He pointed out that northern Alberta has tremendous potential in several areas:

- Aboriginal tourism
- Historical tourism
- Eco-tourism
- Cultural tourism
- Agri-tourism
- Industrial tourism
- Adventure tourism

Mr. Edwards concluded by saying that Edmonton can supply large numbers of visitors to northern Alberta. He explained that Edmonton would like to offer northern Alberta as an add on product and to do this effectively Edmonton needs to work in partnership with the north.

Closing Session

Report Back from Small Group Sessions

The report back session followed the luncheon speakers and was moderated by Kelly Kincaid, NADC Director of Council and Projects. Reporters from each group were given the opportunity to briefly outline their groups' top priorities for tourism industry development and suggestions on cooperative approaches to address these priorities (see **Small Group Sessions**).

Conference Summary

Michael W. Fox provided his thoughts on the conference and offered some motivational words for the northern tourism industry. He was impressed by the vision shown by delegates saying they recognize the potential northern Alberta has as a tourism destination for the future.

He talked about two characteristics that will help the northern industry succeed:

- a great willingness to partner
- commitment to and interest in tourism

Mr. Fox said the success of Travel North 98 will be measured by the future, "when we see what happens in the next six months, one year, two years, five years. And you're going to make it a success by what you do after this conference."

Adjournment

Brian Pountney, Executive Director, Northern Development Branch, adjourned the conference

with a few closing comments. He began by thanking all the delegates and speakers who took part in the conference. He then acknowledged the support and cooperation received from other departments, groups and agencies including the financial contributions of Alberta Economic Development, Alberta North TDR, Economic Development Edmonton and West Edmonton Mall. Without these partners this event would not have happened.

Mr. Pountney reiterated one of Michael Fox's earlier comments stating that the true challenge begins as we each go back into our communities with ideas for partnering. He said the key to tourism development in the north is partnering between industry stakeholders.

He finished by saying that information gathered at this event would be recorded in the conference proceedings. The priorities and actions identified in the small group sessions will be used to inform government through the Northern Alberta Development Council as they meet with northern MLAs and relevant departments.

Appendix A

Delegate List

Norm Adolphson, Mayor, Town of Valleyview, Valleyview

Lois Allen, Owner/Manager, Peace Valley Guest Ranch, Berwyn

Donna Allen, 3D Bed & Breakfast, Peace River

Randy Berard, Recreation Director, Buffalo Lake Metis Settlement, Caslan

Brad Bishop, Northern Development Branch, Peace River

Pete Bjornson, Owner/Operator, Aspen Ridge Campground, High Level

Rita Bjornson, Owner/Operator, Aspen Ridge Campground, High Level

Colette Bomersback, General Manager, Tawatinaw Community Futures Development Corp., Westlock

Monique Bouchard, Marketing & Promotions Coordinator, Town of Cold Lake, Cold Lake

Colin Bouvier, Manager- Community Economic Development, Lac La Biche Regional Community Development Corporation, Lac La Biche

Siebe Brouwer, Owner / Operator, Horse Creek Ranch, Fort Assiniboine

Allan Buck, Director of Community Services, Town of Cold Lake, Cold Lake

Jana Clarke, Program Coordinator, Land of the Mighty Peace Tourist Association, Peace River

Dixie Colter, Ranger i/c, Young's Point Provincial Park, Valleyview

John Dahl, President, Whitecourt & District Heritage Society, Whitecourt

Angele Dobie, Chair of the Alberta North TDR, Executive Director, Fort McMurray Visitors Bureau, Fort McMurray

Philippe Dumont, La Chambre Economique De L'Edmonton, Edmonton

Douglas Dunn, Tourism Coordinator, Athabasca Tourism, Athabasca

Sheila Foley, M.D. 124,

Catherine Forgues, Project Assistant, Destinations Canada Quest, Edmonton

Tricia Freelend, Peace Island Tours, Peace River

Dolores Gilbertson, President, Heart of the Lakeland Marketing Association, Bonnyville

Henry Grandjambe, Manager, Caribou Mountain Wilderness, High Level

Christina Grant, Regional Tourism Coordinator, Athabasca Tourism, Athabasca

Kelly Harlton, Owner, Wildside Wilderness Connection, Widewater

Judy Harlton, Owner, Wildside Wilderness Connection, Widewater

Greg Hembroff, Community Services & Development Officer, M.D. of Big Lakes, High Prairie

Denis Holub, General Manager, Athabasca Inn, Athabasca

Herb Johnson, Owner/Operator, Diamond Willow Resort, Slave Lake

Stevey Johnston, Owner/Operator, Diamond Willow Resort, Slave Lake

Don Kelm, Councillor, Town of Swan Hills, Swan Hills

Kelly Kincaid, Northern Development Branch, Peace River

Ron Laframboise, Economic Development Officer, Little Red River Cree Nation, High Level

Steve Lane, Executive Director, Big Lake Country Tourism, Slave Lake

Aaron Lehman, Big Lake Country Interpretive Tours, Slave Lake

Michelle Lukan, Community Development, Town of Slave Lake, Slave Lake

Stewart MacDonald, Owner/Operator, Northern Transfers, Inc (Charter & Tours), Edmonton

Norma MacQuarrie, Director of Community Development, Town of Slave Lake, Slave Lake

Eugene McLean, Economic Development Officer, Fishing Lake Metis Settlement, Fishing Lake

Sherry Moir, Client Service Officer, Western Economic Diversification Canada, Edmonton

Colin Needham, Northern Development Branch, Peace River

Pat Nelson, Northern Development Branch, Peace River

Floyd Noskiye, Councillor, Little Red River Cree Nation, High Level

Farrell O'Malley, Recreation & Culture Coordinator, Town of Grimshaw, Grimshaw

Gary Pollock, Mayor, Town of Swan Hills, Swan Hills

Dennis Pommen, Consultant, Pommen and Associates, Edmonton

Brian Pountney, Northern Development Branch, Peace River

Mike Radzick, Councillor, M.D. of Clearhills #21, Hines Creek

Joy Rea, Business Consultant, Tawatinaw Community Futures Development Corp., Westlock

Reg Scarfe, Councillor, M. D. MacKenzie #23, Fort Vermilion

Alysia Sharpe, Economic Development Coordinator, Economic Development Committee, Falher

Gwen Shaver, Marketing Coordinator, Alberta North Tourism Destination Region, Slave Lake

Vic Stapleton, Marketing Manager, Grande Cache Tourism and Interpretive Centre, Grande Cache

Les Szabo, General Manager, Grande Prairie Inn, Grande Prairie

Ian Taylor, President, Mikisew Commercial Properties Ltd., Ft. Chipewyan

Floyd Thompson, Northern Alberta Development Council, Kikino

Brian Thoreson, Mayor, Town of Sexsmith, Sexsmith

Gerald Tostowaryk, Economic Development Officer, Gift Lake Metis Settlement Association, Gift Lake

Julie Verreault, Project Manager, Destinations Canada Quest, Edmonton

Gerry Verstraten, Councillor, Town of Grande Cache

Ray Willier, Owner/Manager, Dreamcatcher Inn, High Prairie

Dixie Zizek, Councillor, Town of Swan Hills, Swan Hills

Kelwin Zotzman, Business Analyst, Saskatoon Mountain Economic Development Authority, Beaverlodge

Appendix B

Speaker Contacts

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